

John Boehner
Chairman
8th District, Ohio

House Meets at 10:00 a.m. for Legislative Business

Anticipated Floor Action:

H.R. 2870—Tropical Forest Conservation Act

H.R. 1757—Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act (Conference Report)



H.R. 2870—Tropical Forest Conservation Act

Floor Situation: The House will consider H.R. 2870 as its first order of business today. On Tuesday, March 17, the Rules Committee granted an open rule providing one hour of general debate equally divided between the chairman and ranking member of the International Relations Committee. The rule accords priority in recognition to members whose amendments have been pre-printed in the *Congressional Record*. It allows the chairman of the Committee of the Whole to postpone votes during consideration of the bill and reduce the voting time on a postponed vote to five minutes, so long as it follows a regular 15-minute vote. Finally, the rule provides one motion to recommit, with or without instructions.

Summary: H.R. 2870 amends the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 to encourage the protection of tropical forests through debt reduction in targeted developing countries. The measure authorizes the restructuring of U.S. debts which are unlikely to be repaid fully by less developed countries in exchange for efforts to protect their tropical forests. The bill rechannels \$325 million in existing resources over three years to facilitate “debt-for-nature” swaps with those countries that have the most threatened and globally outstanding tropical forests. The bill also authorizes cost-free “debt buybacks,” whereby a country fully buys back its debt in exchange for providing funds in local currency equal to or up to 40 percent of the purchase price for tropical forest protection. The bill targets developing countries with endangered tropical forests, but requires that a beneficiary country meet certain other requirements, including a government that is democratically elected, is not failing to cooperate on international narcotics matters, does not violate human rights, and has implemented major investment reforms. Assuming appropriations equal to the authorized amounts, CBO estimates that enactment of H.R. 2870 will result in discretionary outlays of \$342 million over FYs 1998-2003. The bill does not affect direct spending, so pay-as-you-go procedures do not apply.

H.R. 2870 was introduced Mr. Portman et al. and was reported by the International Relations Committee by voice vote on March 11, 1998.

Views: Both the Republican Leadership and the Clinton Administration support passage of the bill.

Amendments: At press time, the *Legislative Digest* was aware of the following amendments to H.R. 2870:

Mr. Gilman may offer an amendment (#1) to require the president to notify congressional committees of jurisdiction at least 15 days in advance regarding any proposed reduction of debt or sale or cancellation of loans or credits which the bill authorizes. This effectively allows each transaction to be reviewed by the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and the International Relations Committee. Proponents of the amendment argue that this requirement allows Congress to ensure that the funds go only to approved groups and for approved forest protection purposes in amounts proportional to the debts reduced. *Staff Contact: Mark Kirk, x5-5021*

Mr. Vento may offer an amendment (#2) to make researchers of tropical forest plant life (*e.g.*, scientists researching exotic plants to treat human diseases and illnesses) eligible to receive local currencies by the beneficiary country. Currently, the bill has a list of activities which nongovernmental, environmental, and conservation organizations must follow to become eligible to receive funds; this list does not currently include research in botanical medicine. Proponents of the bill argue that this money will be well spent not only for conserving forests but also for health related concerns which can be cured with possible botanical drugs. *Staff Contact: Maria Pica, x5-6735*

Mr. Vento may offer an amendment (#3) to expand the board of the Enterprise for the Americas to specifically include scientific and academic leaders who have expertise on issues associated with tropical forests, including indigenous leaders. Currently, the bill requires the president to appoint four additional members (two from the U.S. government and two from nongovernmental experts in tropical forests) to the existing Enterprise for the Americas Initiative (EAI) Board. *Staff Contact: Maria Pica, x5-6735*

Additional Information: See *Legislative Digest*, Vol. XXVII, #6, March 13, 1998.



PLEASE NOTE: UNDER AN OPEN RULE, MEMBERS MAY OFFER NEW AMENDMENTS TO A BILL AT ANY TIME, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THEY HAVE BEEN PRE-PRINTED IN THE *CONGRESSIONAL RECORD*.

H.R. 1757—Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act (Conference Report)

Floor Situation: The House may consider the conference report to H.R. 1757 after it completes consideration of H.R. 2870. Conference reports are privileged and may be considered any time three days after they are filed; they are debatable for one hour, may not be amended, and are subject to one motion to recommit. On Wednesday, March 11, the Rules Committee granted a rule waiving all points of order against the conference report and its consideration.

Summary: The conference report to H.R. 1757 authorizes a total of \$13 billion for the Department of State and related agencies in FYs 1998-2000. The bill (1) consolidates two out of three international affairs agencies back into the State Department, (2) authorizes assistance to the democratic opposition in Iraq, (3) authorizes the appropriation of \$819 million in UN arrearages, and (4) denies funding to foreign organizations that perform or promote abortions.

The conference report is divided into three major portions which: (1) authorize the consolidation of two foreign affairs agencies, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the U.S. Information Agency, into the State Department; (2) authorizes \$6.1 billion in FY 1998 and \$6.7 billion in FY 1999 for the State Department, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the U.S. Information Agency, and new funding to support the democratic opposition in Iraq, including \$3 million for Justice in Iraq, \$15 million for democratic opposition (including \$5 million for Radio Free Iraq), \$10 million for political training, and \$20 million for humanitarian assistance; and (3) mandate UN reforms and authorize \$100 million in FY 1998, \$475 million in FY 1999, and \$244 million in FY 2000 for arrearage payments to the UN. The conference report to H.R. 1757 was submitted by Mr. Gilman on March 10, 1998. The House passed H.R. 1757 by voice vote on June 11, 1997, and the Senate approved its version by a vote of 90-5 on June 17, 1997.

Views: The Republican leadership supports passage of the measure. An official Clinton Administration viewpoint was unavailable at press time.

Additional Information: See *Legislative Digest*, Vol. XXVII, #6, March 13, 1998, and Vol. XXVI, #15, Pt. II, June 3, 1997.



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